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Waiting for the Bomb

P.N. Haksar and India's Nuclear Policy in the 1960s

By Yogesh Joshi
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Christian F. Ostermann, Leopoldo Nuti, and Evan Pikulski, Series Editors

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**Waiting for the Bomb:
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Table of Contents

Key Findings.....	iii
PN Haksar: A Profile	4
Misattribution of the “Long Telegram” to PN Haksar.....	10
The “Long Telegram,” Right-Wing Politics, and PN Haksar.....	12
India’s Nuclear Policy in the 1960s	22
Narayanan’s November 1964 Note.....	22
The DAE’s Assessment, April 1970.....	32
Conclusion	37

Key Findings

A recent article in *The National Interest* (TNI) presented archival evidence to argue that India intended to develop a full-spectrum nuclear weapons capability as early as 1969. However, other archival sources related to Indian nuclear history raise doubts about the purported provenance and significance of this source.

- **Contrary to analysis of a note found in PN Haksar's files, the Indian government did not decide to pursue a full-fledged nuclear weapons program in 1968.** A preponderance of archival evidence produced across the Indian government between 1964 and 1970 indicates that the note cited by *TNI* was not reflective of the Indian government's nuclear weapons policy at that time.
- **The note is unlikely to be written by PN Haksar, a close aide to Indira Gandhi, as suggested in the TNI article.** Comparison with Haksar's contemporaneous writings and statements reveals many discrepancies with the agenda proposed in the note. Circumstantial evidence indicates that the note is a book manuscript written by an unknown author that was shared with Haksar and later deposited in Haksar's files when they were transferred to the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.
- **The leadership of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) rejected similar policy notes supportive of nuclear weapons produced around the same time.** One paper proposed by K.R. Narayanan advanced similarly hawkish nuclear views but was not accepted by the MEA leadership. Another top-secret memo by the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) also argued against a strategic nuclear force. On the whole, India's decision-makers were not confident about India's nuclear capabilities and did not support a crash-weapons program to counter China during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Waiting for the Bomb:

PN Haksar and India's Nuclear Policy in the 1960s

Yogesh Joshi¹

On December, 9, 2016, *The National Interest* (TNI) published an article by Dr. Vivek Prahladan titled “The Recent Declassification of India’s Secret ‘Long Telegram’ Shows Why It Went Nuclear.” This article challenged established wisdom around the history of India’s nuclear weapons program.² Most scholarship on Indian nuclear history portrays India as a reluctant nuclear power.³ The factors that prompting India to pursue nuclear weapons are a subject of much debate. Some scholars argue that, domestic factors, especially the role of the scientific bureaucracy and the quest for international prestige, explain India’s nuclear weapons program.⁴

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² Vivek Prahladan, “The Recent Declassification of India’s Secret ‘Long Telegram’ shows why it went Nuclear,” *The National Interest*, 9 December 2016.

³ George Perkovich, *India’s Nuclear Bomb: The Impact on Global Nuclear Nonproliferation* (University of California Press: Los Angeles, 2002); Itty Abraham, *The Making of Indian Atomic Bomb: Science, Secrecy and the Postcolonial State* (Zed Books: London, 1998); Sumit Ganguly (1999), “India’s Pathway to Pokhran II: The Prospects and Sources of India’s Nuclear Weapons Test,” *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (1999), pp. 148–177; C. Raja Mohan, “India’s Nuclear Exceptionalism,” In Sverre Lodgaard, *Nuclear Proliferation and International Security*, (New Delhi: Routledge, 2007), pp. 152–171; Ashley J. Tellis, *India’s Emerging Nuclear Arsenal: Between Recessed Deterrent and Ready Arsenal*, Santo Monica, (California: RAND, 2001); Raj Chengappa, *Weapons of Peace: The Secret Story of India’s Quest to be a Nuclear Power*, (HarperCollins: New Delhi, 2002); Bharat Karnad, *Nuclear Weapons and Indian Security: The Realist Foundations of Strategy*, (Macmillan: New Delhi, 2002); Andrew B. Kennedy, “India’s Nuclear Odyssey: Implicit Umbrellas, Diplomatic Disappointments, and the Bomb,” *International Security*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Fall 2011), pp. 120–153; Gaurav Kampani, “New Delhi’s Long Nuclear Journey: How Secrecy and Institutional Roadblocks delayed India’s Weaponization,” *International Security*, Vol. 38, No.4 (Spring 2014), pp. 71–114; Jayita Sarkar, “The Making of Non-aligned Nuclear Power: India’s Proliferation Drift, 1964–68,” *International History Review*, Vol. 37, No. 5 (2015), p. 933–950; Balazs Szalontai, “The Elephant in the Room: The Soviet Union and India’s nuclear program, 1967–1987,” *NPIHP Working Papers*, Wilson Center, November 2011; Yogesh Joshi, *The Imagined Arsenal: India’s Nuclear Decision-Making, 1973-76*, *NPIHP Working Papers*, Wilson Center, June 2015.

⁴ Abraham, *The Making of Indian Atomic Bomb*, Perkovich, *India’s Nuclear Bomb*; Sagan, “Why do states Build Nuclear Weapons: Three Models in search of the Bomb,”; Also see, Verghese Koithara, *Managing India’s Nuclear Forces*, (Washington DC: Brookings Institutional Press, 2012).

Others point to the nuclear threat from China and later, Pakistan.⁵ Some assert that India's nuclear weapons program was a gradual outcome of the failure of India's disarmament diplomacy, as well as the result of pressure engendered by the nuclear non-proliferation regime.⁶ Still others pointed out "secrecy" and "civil-military relations" as primary factors behind the delay in India's nuclear weapons program.⁷ Scholarly disagreements notwithstanding, there is broad agreement that India's nuclear weapons program has always been a piecemeal affair with a gradual trajectory (spanning four to five decades), unlike other powers which pursued the bomb as quickly as possible.

The *TNI* article, however, claimed otherwise: as early as 1968, Indian decision-makers resolved to go nuclear.⁸ This claim is based on a note entitled, "Need for India in a Changing World to Reassess her National Interest and Foreign Policy," which, according to the Dr. Prahladan, was written by PN Haksar, Secretary to the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1968.⁹ This note proposes a roadmap for an Indian strategic nuclear weapons "stand-off capability" that included medium-range missiles (2,000–3,000 miles) mounted on nuclear-powered submarines with a capacity to strike "deep inside China." Prahladan also claimed that the file is "perhaps the single most important document for establishing the evolving history of India's nuclear weapons policy."¹⁰ In other words, the *TNI* article challenged existing scholarly consensus, claiming that ,

⁵ Raj Chengappa, *Weapons of Peace*; Karnad, *Nuclear Weapons and Indian Security*.

⁶ Kennedy, "India's Nuclear Odyssey: Implicit Umbrellas, Diplomatic Disappointments, and the Bomb,"; Dinshaw Mistry, "The Unrealized Promise of International Institutions: The Test Ban Treaty and India's Nuclear Breakout," *Security Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 4(2003), pp. 116–51; Arundhati Ghosh, "Negotiating the CTBT: India's Security Concerns and Nuclear Disarmament," *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (1997), pp. 239–62.

⁸ Prahladan, *The Recent Declassification*.

⁸ Prahladan, *The Recent Declassification*.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

this so-called “long telegram” provides a strategic coherence to the most “internally debated and divisive” nuclear weapons program of any country.¹¹

This *Working Paper* contests the claims made in the *TNI* article on two grounds. First, I argue that the “long telegram” was misattributed to PN Haksar. Based on a comparison with Haksar’s other attributable memos to Indira Gandhi, it is obvious that the file in question cannot be attributed to Haksar. Second, I argue that Indian nuclear policy in the late 1960s was remarkably different than portrayed in the *TNI* article. A wealth of archival evidence suggests that Indian decision-makers had not made a firm decision to pursue a full-fledged, strategic nuclear weapons program.

This paper first summarizes PN Haksar’s importance to India’s security policy. In the period between 1967 and 1973, when Haksar was the closest advisor to Indira Gandhi, he had a pronounced influence on Indira’s foreign policy. In the second section, I explain how the “long telegram” has been misattributed to Haksar. All evidence suggests that Haksar never wrote this “long telegram.” In fact, “the long telegram” corresponds much more with criticisms of Indira Gandhi’s foreign policy made by right-wing political parties such as the *Jana Sangh* and the *Swatantra* party between 1967 and 1970. In the third section, I explain Haksar’s reactions to these criticisms of Indira Gandhi as well as his own management of India’s international relations as Secretary to the Prime Minister. I focus on Haksar’s views on two important developments in 1968: Soviet military supplies to Pakistan and the superpower *détente* culminating with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Haksar’s views on these issues were remarkably different from the contents of the “long telegram.” In the last section, I attempt to undo the damage done by the misattribution of “long telegram” to Haksar. This section focuses

¹¹ This is one of the major arguments of George Perkovich’s work, see Perkovich, *India’s Nuclear Bomb*, p. 3.

on the complex decision-making within the Indian government related to the nuclear threat from China and the need to have a nuclear weapons program. Until 1970, the Indian government remained undecided and in fact argued against going nuclear. The conclusion summarizes the key findings of this paper, but also looks at the dangers and opportunities for scholarship offered by the continuous declassification of documents in India.

PN Haksar: A Profile

Parmeshwar Narain Haksar was, in the words of J.N. Dixit, India's former Foreign Secretary and National Security Advisor, one of the most important "behind-the-scenes operators" among the makers of modern Indian foreign policy.¹² Born on September 4, 1913 in a Kashmiri pandit family, he was educated both in India and the United Kingdom. The most important intellectual influences in Haksar's life during his student years in the UK were Krishna Menon and Rajni Palme Dutt.¹³ Menon, who later became a close aid of Prime Minister Nehru, actively pursued India's independence through an organization called the India League in 1930s.¹⁴ Dutt, a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain, was thoroughly Marxist. In this way, Haksar's student life was shaped both by India's freedom movement and by Marxist thought.¹⁵ These influences, as Subrata Bannerjee argues, had "brought [Haksar] to Marxism and gave him a

¹² JN Dixit, *Makers of India's Foreign Policy: From Raja Ram Mohan Roy to Yashwant Sinha* (New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2004), p. 167. Also, see, HY Sharada Prasad, *The Book I won't be Writing and other Essays* (New Delhi: Chronicle Books, 2003), pp. 84–87.

¹³ Subrata Bannerjee, "Parmeshwar Narain Haksar: A profile," in Subrata Banerjee (ed.), *Challenges in Nation Building in a World of Turmoil: Papers presented at the Fourth Haksar memorial Seminar-cum-Lecture series on Nation Building, Development Process, Communication and Governance organised by CRRID from 9-15 November 2005* (Haksar Memorial Volume III), (Chandigarh: Center for Research and Industrial Development, 2004), pp. ix–x.

¹⁴ On Krishna Menon's contributions to Indian diplomacy see, Michael Brecher, *India and World Politics: Krishna Menon's View of the World* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968).

¹⁵ A.R. Kidwai, "Shri PN Haksar: A Tribute", in Subrata Banerjee (ed.), *Challenges in Nation Building in a World of Turmoil: Papers presented at the Fourth Haksar memorial Seminar-cum-Lecture series on Nation Building, Development Process, Communication and Governance organised by CRRID from 9–15 November 2005* (Haksar Memorial Volume III), (Chandigarh: Center for Research and Industrial Development, 2004), pp. 8–9.

world outlook and a methodology of social analysis that remained a source of inspiration all his life and informed his concept of plural humanism and a humane society.”¹⁶

Haksar joined the Indian Foreign Service as an Officer on Special Duty (OSD) in 1947. From the word “go,” Haksar was in the thick of India’s Cold War diplomacy. His first big assignment came in early 1948 as a member of the Indian delegation to the United Nations Security Council on the Kashmir question. As Nehru wrote Lord Mountbatten on 28 February 1948 that, among stalwarts like Gopalaswami Ayyangar and Girija Shankar Bajpai, “there is another very intelligent and bright young man named PN Haksar whom we sent with the delegation.”¹⁷ Thereafter, he moved to London in May 1948, where he assisted India’s High Commissioner Krishna Menon until 1952. These “four years of apprenticeship,” as Haksar wrote upon Menon’s death in October 1974, taught him that “in diplomacy the most important thing was courage, a non-negotiable sense of dedication to the interests of one’s country and *capacity to see* (emphasis added), what your opponent has in mind and to discern whether there was a basis for linking up your *opponent’s concern with your own* (emphasis added).”¹⁸

Beginning in 1952, Haksar rose steadily in his bureaucratic career. Between 1953 and 1954, he was Advisor and Alternative Chairman to the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission in Korea. In 1955, he was appointed as Director of the External Publicity Division of the MEA and in 1958, he was promoted to the post of Joint Secretary. In 1960, he became India’s envoy to Nigeria, followed by ambassadorships to Dohomy and Togo (1962–1964) and Austria (1964–

¹⁶ Bannerjee, “Parmeshwar Narain Haksar: A profile,” p. ix.

¹⁷ Nehru Memorial and Museum Library, “Letter from Nehru to Mountbatten,” 28 February 1948 (Jawaharlal Nehru Papers, Post-1947), Subject file 6.

¹⁹ Malhotra, *Indira Gandhi: A Personal and Political Biography*, p. 95; Frank, *Indira: The Life of Indira Nehru Gandhi*, pp. 297–298.

1965). In Vienna, Haksar represented India at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). In 1965, he was posted to London as India's Deputy High Commissioner.

Haksar's important break came in 1966, when Indira Gandhi appointed him Secretary in the Prime Minister's Secretariat. Haksar's value was recognized by Indira Gandhi at a very critical period in her young Prime Ministership. After the sudden death of Prime Minister Shastri in January 1966, Gandhi had taken over the reins of the Indian National Congress and had become India's Prime Minister. The opposition within Congress was substantial and the domestic situation precarious. As Indira had told veteran journalist Inder Malhotra, food and economic aid from the West had become a necessity.¹⁹ Securing this aid was the principal objective of her April 1966 tour of the United States. Yet Western assistance came with conditions: both the IMF and the World Bank demanded the opening of the Indian economy as a prerequisite for economic aid, including devaluation of the Indian rupee. Her close group of advisors, which included Principal Secretary L.K. Jha (who was also Principal Secretary to Prime Minister Shastri), advised Indira to not only accede to some of these demands, but also suggested adoption of a generally pro-western foreign policy (for example, by cutting down on India's criticisms of the war in Vietnam).²⁰

In June 1966, Prime Minister Gandhi announced a 35-percent devaluation of the rupee. The backlash from left-leaning elements of the Congress was severe. The Congress Party criticized its own government and passed a resolution against devaluation—public opinion became as aroused as it was during the 1962 war with China. As Katherine Frank argues, “within months of becoming the Prime Minister, Indira had managed to make herself far more unpopular

¹⁹ Malhotra, *Indira Gandhi: A Personal and Political Biography*, p. 95; Frank, *Indira: The Life of Indira Nehru Gandhi*, pp. 297–298.

²⁰ Malhotra, *Indira Gandhi: A Personal and Political Biography*, p. 94–95.

than Shastri had ever been.”²¹ Indira admitted later that “she had been taken for a ride” by her own advisors.²² She soon lost faith in L.K. Jha.²³ She also realized that “her political survival depended on a reversion to Left-leaning policies and revival of her mildly radical image.”²⁴ PN Haksar had not only opposed devaluation, but also cautioned Gandhi against cozying up to the West.²⁵ As Deputy High Commissioner in London during early 1966, “Haksar’s role was relatively minor and largely behind the scenes.”²⁶ Yet by late 1966, Haksar emerged as the most appropriate choice to replace Jha in the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO). His loyalty to the Nehru-Gandhi family and left-leaning political outlook proved to be important assets.

Thus began the “most important phase” of Haksar’s bureaucratic career and the apogee of his influence in the Prime Minister’s office.²⁷ In the words of former Indian Prime Minister I.K. Gujral, Haksar “turned PM’s Secretariat into a power center and made it a fountainhead of ideas and policies”.²⁸ For J.N. Dixit, “he was the most influential civil service figure in Indira’s government and through his seven years[’] tenure, he was equally influential in the management of domestic politics.”²⁹ During these seven years, India navigated a number of foreign policy challenges including the Non-Proliferation Treaty; open hostilities in the Sino-Soviet relationship

²¹ Frank, *Indira: The Life of Indira Nehru Gandhi*, p. 299.

²² Malhotra, *Indira Gandhi: A Personal and Political Biography*, p. 97.

²³ Inder Kumar Gujral, “PN Haksar: Governance with Social Purpose,” in Subrata Banerjee (ed.), *Contributions in Remembrance: Homage to PN Haksar* (Haksar Memorial Volume II), (Chandigarh: Center for Research and Industrial Development, 2004), p. 12.

²⁴ Malhotra, *Indira Gandhi: A Personal and Political Biography*, p. 98;

²⁵ Malhotra, *Indira Gandhi: A Personal and Political Biography*, p. 96–97.

²⁶ Malhotra, *Indira Gandhi: A Personal and Political Biography*, p. 96–97.

²⁷ Bannerjee, “Parmeshwar Narain Haksar: A profile,” pp. ix–x.

²⁸ Inder Kumar Gujral, “PN Haksar: Governance with Social Purpose,” in Subrata Banerjee (ed.), *Contributions in Remembrance: Homage to PN Haksar* (Haksar Memorial Volume II), (Chandigarh: Center for Research and Industrial Development, 2004), p. 13.

²⁹ Dixit, *The Makers of India’s Foreign Policy*, p. 167.

in 1969; the 1971 war in Bangladesh; and negotiations with Pakistan on the repatriation of prisoners of war³⁰

Haksar's loyalty to Indira Gandhi also had some authoritarian characteristics. One of the major criticisms of Haksar's tenure was the centralization of policymaking in the PMO, to the detriment of other institutions like the MEA.³¹ On the other hand, Dixit criticized Haksar for "[advocating] that the India civil service, particularly the Foreign Service, should move away from their constitutionally stipulated character as non-political entities and be committed to the ideology of the Prime Minister."³² As Sharada Prasad has argued, Haksar had put forth the doctrine of a "committed bureaucracy."³³ In this way, Haksar's unflinching loyalty to Indira Gandhi had its own downsides.

As Principal Secretary, Haksar did everything possible to perpetuate and strengthen Indira's hold on India's domestic, foreign, and security policies. In early 1972, Indira Gandhi had given the go-ahead for exploding a nuclear device.³⁴ This order resulted in the Peaceful Nuclear Explosion of May 1974. Haksar, according to Ramanna, was the intermediary between the scientists and the Prime Minister. In 1974, the scientists, as Ramanna explains, "were keen to get on the job and finish it quickly," as "they could not be kept on suspended animation for indefinite periods."³⁵ Two kinds of objections were proposed by Indira's close advisors. On one hand, PN Dhar and other economists argued against the test because it may have had economic consequences. For Ramanna, Haksar's objections were "more difficult to understand,"—he

³⁰ Kamal Hossain, "PN Haksar and India's Finest Hour, in Subrata Banerjee (ed.), *Contributions in Remembrance: Homage to PN Haksar* (Haksar Memorial Volume II), (Chandigarh: Center for Research and Industrial Development, 2004), p.17; JN Dixit, *Makers of India's Foreign Policy*, p. 167.

³¹ Gujral, "PN Haksar: Governance with Social Purpose," p. 13.

³² Dixit, *The Makers of India's Foreign Policy*, p. 168.

³³ Sharada Prasad, *The Book I won't be Writing and other Essays*, p. 86.

³⁴ Raj Chengappa, *Weapons of Peace*.

³⁵ Ramanna, "Five Decades of Scientific Development: Memories of PN Haksar," p. 62.

objected to the timing of the test, not its consequences. As Ramanna explains, “[Haksar] was of the view that we should wait for election time, some six months later, to be able to use it to defeat the opposition parties.”³⁶ For Haksar, Indira’s principal strategist, politics was always in command.

The mid-1970s saw Haksar’s gradual banishment by Prime Minister Gandhi, first because of his criticisms of the Emergency, and even more so because Haksar was fearful of how Sanjay Gandhi, Indira Gandhi’s son, was distorting her political career and legacy.³⁷ Haksar was, in fact, at the “receiving end of much harassment by the emergency regime.”³⁸ He was first shifted to the Planning Commission, where he was Deputy Chairman for two years. He was also a member of the United Nations Civil Service Commission between 1975 and 1980. Later, Haksar took up writing and published and edited a number of books on domestic and foreign policy, including a biography of his early years.³⁹ His writings are illustrative of his political ideas: Haksar was a firm believer that détente between the US and the USSR was good for India, that nuclear weapons do not provide adequate security, and that India had to address its own limitations before it could take on a bigger global role.⁴⁰ This “hard boiled diplomat,” as his

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Between 1975 and 1977 Indira Gandhi instructed President of India Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed to declare a state of emergency and suspend the democracy—one of the most controversial periods of India’s history. Sharada Prasad, *The Book I won’t be Writing and other Essays*, pp. 85.

³⁸ Malhotra, *Indira Gandhi: A Personal and Political Biography*, p. 172; also see, Frank, *Indira: The Life of Indira Nehru Gandhi*, pp. 352–353.

³⁹ PN Haksar, *Reflections of our Times* (New Delhi: Lancer, 1982); PN Haksar et.al., *Studies in Indo-Soviet Relations*, (New Delhi: Patriot, 1986); PN Haksar, *India’s Foreign Policy and Its Problems* (New Delhi: Patriot, 1989); PN Haksar (ed.) *Nehru’s Vision of Peace and Security in Nuclear Age* (New Delhi: Patriot, 1989).

⁴⁰ Beyond the books cited above, see, PN Haksar, “Non-Alignment: Retrospect and Prospect,” in *Man and Development* (May 1979) and reproduced in Subrata Bannerjee (ed.), *PN Haksar: Contemplations on the Human Condition-selected Writings, speeches and letters* (Haksar Memorial Volume I), (Chandigarh: Center for Research and Industrial Development, 2004), p. 224–242; PN Haksar, “National Security: Aspects and Dimensions,” *Secular Democracy*, Independence Number (1982) and reproduced in Subrata Bannerjee (ed.), *PN Haksar: Contemplations on the Human Condition-selected Writings, speeches and letters* (Haksar Memorial Volume I), (Chandigarh: Center for Research and Industrial Development, 2004), p. 270–281; PN Haksar, “India in the Nuclear Age,” *Secular Democracy*, Independence Number (1982) and reproduced in reproduced in Subrata Bannerjee (ed.), *PN Haksar:*

daughter Nandita Haksar suggested in 2004, died “a broken man” in 1998 due to two reasons: “one was the collapse of the Soviet Union and secondly [because of] the Kashmir situation.”⁴¹

For many reasons, then, Haksar's contributions to India's foreign and security policies are an important area of study. Because of Haksar's role in Prime Minister Gandhi's foreign and security policy, the provenance of the “long telegram” is critical to understanding India's nuclear history.

Misattribution of the “Long Telegram” to PN Haksar

While *TNI* did not provide a citation for the “long telegram,” the source is referenced in the author's book *The Nation Declassified: India and the Cold War World*, published during 2016.⁴²

In Prahladan's book, the “long telegram” is extensively quoted from and summarized between pages 162–166 under a subtitle, “PN Haksar 1968–69 *Invalid Source Specified [emphasis added]*.” The correct archival source is in fact “Subject File 290, PN Haksar Papers (IIIrd Installment)” at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML)

Before discussing the content of File No. 290, it is important to understand the nature of the PN Haksar Papers available at the Nehru Library. The NMML houses private papers. These are not declassified government records, but rather collections of documents from individuals

Contemplations on the Human Condition-selected Writings, speeches and letters (Haksar Memorial Volume I), (Chandigarh: Center for Research and Industrial Development, 2004), p. 282–288; PN Haksar, “The Gorbachev Phenomenon,” in *Man and Development* (December 1986) and reproduced in Subrata Bannerjee (ed.), *PN Haksar: Contemplations on the Human Condition-selected Writings, speeches and letters* (Haksar Memorial Volume I), (Chandigarh: Center for Research and Industrial Development, 2004), p. 246–251; PN Haksar, “Some Reflections on the Gulf war,” *Man and Development* (March 1991) and reproduced in Subrata Bannerjee (ed.), *PN Haksar: Contemplations on the Human Condition-selected Writings, speeches and letters* (Haksar Memorial Volume I), (Chandigarh: Center for Research and Industrial Development, 2004), p. 252–259.

⁴¹ Nandita Haksar, “In memory of my father,” Subrata Banerjee (ed.), *Challenges in Nation Building in a World of Turmoil: Papers presented at the Fourth Haksar memorial Seminar-cum-Lecture series on Nation Building, Develop Proces, Communication and Governance organised by CRRID from 9-15 November 2005* (Haksar Memorial Volume III), (Chandigarh: Center for Research and Industrial Development, 2004), p. 13–14.

⁴² Vivek Prahladan, *The Nation Declassified: India and the Cold War World*, (New Delhi: Har Anand, 2016).

who served in the Indian government. Officially declassified documents are housed in the National Archives of India. Private papers may therefore contain government documents, but by their very nature they also contain a lot of other items, including personal papers, letters, unpublished writings (including the unpublished work of others shared with Haksar), and sometimes unattributable documents. Therefore, the Haksar Papers at NMML papers contain anything and everything written on paper, by him or others, found at his home in 1998.

All evidence suggests that the “long telegram” was not written by PN Haksar. In fact, the “long telegram” found in File No. 290 echoes conservative foreign policy ideas offered by right-wing domestic parties which were critical of Indira Gandhi’s foreign policy during this period. It appears to be a draft book manuscript on India’s foreign relations which may have been given to Haksar (we do not know by whom). The “long telegram” is just one part of this file, which also has “chapters” on Pakistan, Russia, US, Australia, New Zealand and China. There is no obvious way it can be attributed to Haksar, the Prime Minister's Secretariat, or the Indian Government, as it lacks signatures or other insignia. The papers also lack classification markings (immediate, confidential, secret, or top secret), as is the norm for Indian government documents. It has no imprimatur for a government department, the Prime Minister’s Secretariat or otherwise. The date “1968” given by *TNI* is just the author’s approximation—these papers are undated. Since 2009, eleven scholars (including myself) have looked at this file.⁴³ No one, besides Dr. Prahladan, has used it in any scholarship.⁴⁴ File No. 290 is actually a continuation of four files (289, 290, 291, and 292) in Transcript Number III, PN Haksar papers.⁴⁵ Furthermore, the NMML has not even classified these under ‘Prime Minister’s Secretariat’ in their transcript list.

⁴³ At least 10 other scholars have seen this file since September 2009. See, NMML, “Researcher’s Log Book”, Subject File No. 290, PN Haksar Papers (IIIrd Installment).

⁴⁴ NMML, PN Haksar Transcript List (IIIrd Installment), p. 164.

⁴⁵ NMML, PN Haksar Transcript List (IIIrd Installment), p. 164.

Because the PN Haksar papers are a private collection, the responsibility for correctly attributing documents rests upon the researcher. In the book *The Nation Declassified*, there is not a single other reference to the “long telegram” (from either the existing literature or otherwise) that Prahladan has used to substantiate his claims. The fact is that no such reference exists.⁴⁶

The “Long Telegram,” Right-Wing Politics, and PN Haksar

Having misattributed the “single most important document in India’s nuclear history” to PN Haksar, a number of tricks are played with File No. 290 in Prahladan’s *The National Interest* article and in his book, *The Nation Declassified*.⁴⁷

First of all, the note entitled “Need for India in a Changing World to Reassess her National Interest and Foreign Policy” is just seven pages long. Many of the additional points are from “chapters” on Pakistan, Russia, US, and China.⁴⁸ Therefore, the entirety of File No. 290—not just the note which is analyzed in the *TNI* article or in the book, *The Nation Declassified*—is the “long telegram.” Second, the policy prescriptions, including those on nuclear weapons, have

⁴⁶ Foot note 2 refers to most scholarly works on India’s nuclear history. Nowhere in this literature, the “long telegram” has been mentioned. Even the scholarship which tends to portray a very ‘security and national interest’ driven nature of India’s nuclear weapons program has not cited any such “long telegram” (see Chengappa and Karnad). The “long telegram” has also not been mentioned in any writings by PN Haksar or reflections on PN Haksar by other government officials. See, PN Haksar, *Reflections of our Times* (New Delhi: Lancer, 1982); PN Haksar, “Summing up”, in VD Chopra (eds.) *Studies in Indo-Pak Relations: Papers Presented at the Seminar on Indo-Pak relations organised by the India Center for Regional Affairs, New Delhi 24–25 April, 1984*, (New Delhi: Patriot, 1984), pp. 292–299; PN Haksar et.al., *Studies in Indo-Soviet Relations*, (New Delhi: Patriot, 1986); PN Haksar, *India's Foreign Policy and Its Problems* (New Delhi: Patriot, 1989); PN Haksar (ed.) *Nehru's Vision of Peace and Security in Nuclear Age* (New Delhi: Patriot, 1989). For writings of PN Haksar’s contemporaries and others in the Indian Government see, TN Kaul, *Ambassadors Need Not Lie: Some aspects of India's Foreign Policy* (New Delhi: Lancer, 1988); TN Kaul, *Stalin to Gorbachev and Beyond* (New Delhi: Lancer, 1991); TN Kaul, *Reminiscences: Discreet and Indiscreet* (New Delhi: Lancer, 1982); Raja Ramanna, *Years of Pilgrimage: An Autobiography* (New Delhi: Viking, 1991); BK Nehru, *Nice Guys Finish Second* (Viking: New Delhi, 1997); Jagat S. Mehta, *The Tryst Betrayed: Reflections and Diplomacy and Development* (New Delhi: Penguin, Viking, 2010); ; Dixit, J.N. (1995), *Anatomy of a Flawed Inheritance: Indo-Pak Relations 1970–1994*, New Delhi: Konark. It has not even been mentioned in the Kargil Review Committee Report, see, Government of India (New Delhi), *Kargil Review Committee Report*, 15 December 1999.

⁴⁷ Prahladan, *The Nation Declassified*, pp. 161–166.

⁴⁸ NMML, unattributable and undated, Subject File 290, PN Haksar Papers (IIIrd Installment).

been quoted very selectively. This is how foreign-policy prescriptions, including those on nuclear matters in Haksar's unattributable "long telegram," appear:

- a) "Non-alignment should continue as the initial premise of this Foreign Policy in the sense that military alliance with either Russia or America or both should be avoided as serving, at this stage of India's development, no real national purpose;
- b) To the extent that foreign powers may be interested in maintaining India's integrity as a state and the integrity of her Himalayan frontiers with China, India's own ability to fight in defence of these instruments will more surely influence Moscow or Washington, or both, than any open engagement with either or both of these powers seeking this protection which, as explained in the *chapter on nuclear arms for India* [emphasis added] is wholly unreliable.⁴⁹
- c) It is certain that India must not surrender her nuclear options in her vital national interests;
- d) A primary aim of Indian Foreign Policy should be take steps to keep open and indestructible the avenues which permit this great country, with a great history and vast human and natural resources, to attain progressively a position of real dignity, power and authority in the comity of nations; and this certainly involves the following measures taken in the shortest possible span of time:
 - 1) The development simultaneously of submarine driven by nuclear power fitted out to carry nuclear missiles as this would extend and re-inforce the scope and effect of India's military and, by implication, political authority in South and South East Asia and indeed, *further afield eventually*;
 - 2) This nuclear arms programme should be based on adequate stock-piling of those instruments and machineries which, *as Russia and America advance their common policy towards nuclear non-proliferation*, will be difficult to import from abroad increasingly;

⁴⁹ This "chapter" is available in File No. 292 which the author of the "long telegram" has not seen. Towards the end of this chapter in the conclusion, it is more than evident that these random papers are part of a book: "the areas where advantageous collaboration between China, Japan and India is possible are elaborated in the *final chapter of this book*. See NMML, unattributable and undated, "India and Nuclear Arms," Subject File 292, PN Haksar Papers (IIIrd Installment).

- 3) All Indian metallurgists, physicists and others who could be really useful in developing a nuclear arms programme for India and, attracted by better material and other conditions abroad, are working in foreign countries, should be called back and integrated with the establishments controlled by the Indian atomic energy Commission at high rates of pay and with every incentive available to them;
- 4) Every attempt should be made in *conditions of assured secrecy* to sound the Japanese about collaboration in these fields.”⁵⁰

The note is clearly written by a nuclear hawk. Unlike the claim in *The National Interest* article over how the “long telegram” supports India’s nuclear doctrine of Credible Minimum Deterrence vis-a-vis the revisionist comments recently made by Indian Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar, the “long telegram” is proposing a *touz azimuths* nuclear-force structure, which to date is only prescribed by a handful of Indian strategists and has been completely ignored by successive governments since 1998, irrespective of their political ideology.⁵¹

Second, points three and five indicate that Haksar was inclined toward nuclear proliferation—the implication here is that India’s nuclear-energy program between 1968 and 1974 was therefore just a façade for its weapons program. If extrapolated, it also translates to the fact that all peaceful nuclear programs that India had with US and Canadian cooperation between 1968 and 1974 were geared towards nuclear proliferation. One can only wonder how many Indian nuclear scientists, diplomats, and other decision-makers would agree with this idea. It also belies the most important attribute of India’s nuclear program: Its quest for self-reliance and its unmatched record on nuclear non-proliferation even after the 1974 tests, US’ inability to provide

⁵⁰ NMML, Unattributable and undated, Subject File 290, PN Haksar Papers (IIIrd Installment). Emphasis added.

⁵¹ Prahladan, *The Recent Declassification*. For schools of thoughts on India’s nuclear posture see, Kanti Bajpai, “The Great Indian Nuclear Debate,” in Anindyo J. Majumdar (ed.), *Nuclear India into the New Millennium*, (New Delhi: Lancers, 2000), pp.47–74.

fuel for the Tarapur reactor in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and targeting of the Indian nuclear and space program in the decades following.

Third, if this “long telegram” was sent by PN Haksar to Indira Gandhi, it would also sabotage the foundations of Indian foreign policy in the 1960s and 1970s. There are a total of 15 policy prescriptions (points ‘a’ through ‘o’).⁵² For the want of space, the rest can only be summarized here:

- (e) Indian arms industry should be modernised;
- (f) Cooperation with Japan on heavy-defense industries;
- (g) Development of computers and allied industries;
- (h) Cooperation with Romania and Yugoslavia;
- (i) Cooperation with “no inhibitions whatever about the Hitlerian past of Germany”;
- (j) Provide “free” military training to South, South East Asian, West Asian and African countries;
- (k) Efforts to be made with the United Nations for freeing Africa from the “grip of settlers of foreign origin”;
- (l) Cooperation with Britain for “mutual advantage (even) when that country pursues increasingly a policy of direct and indirect support for the lands of apartheid”;
- (m) Deal with African countries on the “yardstick of her own national interests” and “it is neither profitable nor necessary to act in a manner which suggests that India’s support of such states and governments is outright and unqualified in all circumstances”;
- (n) Cooperate with Canada, other smaller countries of Western and Eastern Europe who have “no conflict of interest with India,” and finally,
- (o) Cultivate relations with Latin American countries.

By attributing the so-called “long telegram” to PN Haksar, India’s whole foreign policy approach in the 1960s and 1970s becomes completely inconsistent.

⁵² NMML, Unattributable and undated, Subject File. 290, PN Haksar Papers (IIIrd Installment).

If one instead compares the “long telegram” with arguments from right-wing political parties like the Jan Sangh and the Swatantra between 1967 and 1970, uncanny similarities appear. Broadly, Prahladan argues that the “long telegram” was a response to two major factors: the USSR supplying military equipment to Pakistan in 1968 and the USSR-Soviet detente resulting in the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Between 1967 and 1970, the writings of Jan Sangh and Swatantra ideologues and sympathizers—including HM Patel, Balraj Madhok, Deen Dayal Upadhaya, KR Malkani, Piloo Mody, MR Pai, MR Masani, Subramaniam Swamy, Major Ranjith Singh, ML Sondhi, Prince Dev Prasad Ghosh, and Dr. G.K Mukherjee, among others—continuously attacked Indira Gandhi’s foreign policy on two counts: softening of the Soviet attitude towards Pakistan, and the detente between the two superpowers that resulted in the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).⁵³⁵⁴

⁵³ A good summary of these can be found in Mohammed Ali Kishore, *Jana Sangh and India's Foreign Policy*, (New Delhi: Associated Publishing House, 1969); For Swatantra Party see, H.L. Erdman, *The Swatantra Party and Indian Conservatism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967). For original writings see, H.M Patel, “India’s Defence Preparedness,” Swatantra Souvenir (Fifth Annual Convention, Bhubaneshwar), 5and 6 October 1968, p. 44–47, p. 38–40; Piloo Mody, “India’s Foreign Policy,” Swatantra Souvenir (Fifth Annual Convention, Bhubaneshwar), 5and 6 October 1968, p. 44–47; M.R. Pai, “India’s Foreign Policy: The Need for Reappraisal,” Swatantra Souvenir (Fifth Annual Convention, Bhubaneshwar), 5and 6 October 1968, p. 168–169; Deen Dayal Upadyaya, “Fundamentals of a War economy,” Jana-Deep Souvenir (A Publication brought out on the occasion of Mid-Term elections, 1971), pp. 15–20; K. R. Malkani, “How Jana Sangh looks at Russia and America,” Jana-Deep Souvenir (A Publication brought out on the occasion of Mid-Term elections, 1971), pp. 56–59; Ram Singh, “India: a country without friends,” Jana-Deep Souvenir (A Publication brought out on the occasion of Mid-Term elections, 1971), pp.139–141; M.L. Sondhi, “Wanted: A National Foreign Policy,” Jana-Deep Souvenir (A Publication brought out on the occasion of the 14th Annual Session of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, Calicut, December 1967), pp. 47–53; K.R. Malkani, “How we look at the Middle East,” Jana-Deep Souvenir (A Publication brought out on the occasion of the 14th Annual Session of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, Calicut, December 1967), pp. 63–65; Balraj Madhok, “India’s Unity,” Jana-Deep Souvenir (A Publication brought out on the occasion of the 15th Annual Session of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, Bombay, April 25–27, 1969), pp. 62–66; Subramaniam Swamy, “Defence and Economic Growth in India: a study in an inseparable relationship,” Jana-Deep Souvenir (A Publication brought out on the occasion of the 15th Annual Session of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, Bombay, April 25–27, 1969), pp. 67–87; Prin. Dev Prasad Ghosh, “let’s make the indian ocean REALLY INDIAN,” Jana-Deep Souvenir (A Publication brought out on the occasion of the 15th Annual Session of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, Bombay, April 25–27, 1969), pp. 88–89; Nana Deshmukh, “Essentials of a National Industrial Policy,” Jana-Deep Souvenir (A Publication brought out on the occasion of the 15th Annual Session of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, Bombay, April 25–27, 1969), pp. 98–101.

⁵⁴ A good summary of these can be found in Mohammed Ali Kishore, *Jana Sangh and India's Foreign Policy*, (New Delhi: Associated Publishing House, 1969); For Swatantra Party see, H.L. Erdman, *The Swatantra Party and Indian Conservatism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967).

As the President of Bharatiya Jan Sangh, former Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, argued in his presidential address at the Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha Session (Indore) in September 1968, “The USSR’s decision to supply arms to Pakistan provides a glaring instance to show how our foreign policy has failed to protect and promote the enlightened self-interests of the country.”⁵⁵ Similarly, regarding the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the Jana Sangh party resolution of March 22, 1968, proclaimed, “Soviet Russia and U.S.A. are mounting their pressure on India to sign the non-proliferation treaty. The Government of India seem to be somewhat weakening in its resolve not to sign the treaty in its present form.”⁵⁶ Similar questions on foreign policy were raised by HM Patel, MR Pai and Piloo Mody during the Fifth National Convention of the Swatantra Party in October 1968 in Bhubaneswar.⁵⁷

Attribution of the “long telegram” to PN Haksar, therefore, not only changes Haksar’s political inclinations but questions his loyalty to Indira Gandhi and the Indian government. Interventions made by right-wing conservative parties on Indian foreign policy were an important contribution to the discourse on Indian foreign policy, as should be the case in any pluralistic democracy. But such ideas cannot be transposed to PN Haksar. Haksar was not a closet “right wing ideologue” hidden among the Prime Minister’s Secretariat. The PN Haksar papers at NMML and documents at the National Archives of India provide answers to the confusion created by the “long telegram.” On the question of Soviet military supplies and the

⁵⁵ Bharatiya Jana Sangh, “Presidential Address by Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee,” Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha Session, Indore, September 7 and 8, 1968, p. 22.

⁵⁶ Bharatiya Jana Sangh, “Beware of Non-proliferation Treaty,” Resolution adopted on 22 March 1968 at CWC, Bhopal, in *Party Documents (Volume 3), Resolutions on Defence and External Affairs* (New Delhi: Bharatiya Jana Sangh, July 1973).

⁵⁷ H.M Patel, “India’s Defence Preparedness,” p. 44–47, p. 38–40; Piloo Mody, “India’s Foreign Policy,” p. 44–47; M.R. Pai, “India’s Foreign Policy: The Need for Reappraisal,” p. 168–169.

issue of NPT, Haksar's advice to Indira Gandhi was radically different from those contained in the long telegram.

On 13 July, 1968, PN Haksar wrote a top-secret memo to Prime Minister Gandhi over the ruckus created by the Jan Sangh and Swatantra Party related to the shipment of Soviet military supplies to Pakistan.⁵⁸ The Soviet decision to provide military assistance to Pakistan, as Haksar argued, raised two important issues for the Gandhi government: "one in the field of our relations with the USSR and the other in the domestic field. It is the later which is of immediate consequence." While accepting that the Soviet decision was "erroneous and misguided," he argued that Indo-Soviet relations are "many-sided and complex." If this bilateral relationship could be seen on a "balance sheet of credits and debits," the Soviet decision on military supplies fell on the "debit side." However, in Haksar's view, the "overall situation remains favourable" to India. Haksar opined that India has been "accustomed all these years to have a sort of favourable exclusiveness in our relations with the USSR which we did not have in our relations with any other country." But there is nothing much India could do about the changing attitude of the Soviet Union: "We may bemoan this fact, but we have to live with it."

To emphasize his point, he provided an example of India's relations with the US: "we engage in mutually beneficial relations (with the US)" even when the: "fact remains that from 1954 to 1965, the US pursued certain policies which ran contrary to our interests so far as the affairs of the subcontinent were concerned . . . US tanks killed our people both in the Kutch area and subsequently in the conflict in August–September 1965."

Haksar's advice to Indira Gandhi over the protestations of the Jan Sangh and Swatantra was to remind them what he thought their ideas on foreign policy lacked the most—"that international

⁵⁸ NMML, "From Haksar to Prime Minister," 13 July 1968 (Immediate), Prime Minister's Secretariat (Top Secret), PN Haksar papers (IIIrd Installment), Subject File no. 135. ,

relations are an amalgam of complex and even contrary factors.” This document reveals the sophistication of Haksar’s thoughts on international relations and highlights the contrast between Haksar’s view of the world and that of the long telegram’s author.

Like a classical realist, Haksar understood India’s limits: for India to progress, it had to maintain good relations with both the US and the USSR; there was no other choice.⁵⁹ The “complex and contrarian” factors of international politics manifested themselves within a year of Haksar’s advice to Indira Gandhi. In March 1969, the Soviet Union and China declared open hostilities following the Ussuri River clashes.⁶⁰ The Soviet Union then proposed the Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation to New Delhi. Prime Minister Gandhi signed the treaty only in August 1971, when India needed Soviet support during the Bangladesh. Haksar was the agreement’s chief architect.

Detente between the superpowers was also essential for India’s security. As Srinath Raghavan has argued, the changing international situation during and after the Cuban missile crisis was an important factor behind China’s decision to attack India in October 1962.⁶¹ Any upheaval within the international landscape and a crisis between the Soviet Union and the US provided an opportunity for China to exploit. If this held true for conventional conflict between India and China, it was equally applicable to the nuclear scenario. As L.K. Jha (Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister) argued in a top-secret memo titled “nuclear policy” to Indira Gandhi in May 1967:

Even if there is a full scale war with China, I doubt if the Chinese would use nuclear weapons . . . one reason for this is that they [China] would know that in such an event, neither the USA nor the

⁵⁹ The author of the “long telegram” has not seen this file.

⁶⁰ Srinath Raghavan, *1971: A Global History of the Creation of Bangladesh*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

⁶¹ Srinath Raghavan, “The Fifty Year Crisis: India and China after 1962,” Seminar, Vol. 641, January 2013. Also see, Srinath Raghavan, *War and Peace in Modern India*, (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2010).

USSR could stand by and watch. The danger to both these powers from a nuclear China which has subjugated India, would be too tremendous for them to face.⁶²

Haksar's own views on detente were remarkably similar. In July 1967, he sent a long note to Prime Minister Gandhi on foreign policy. Argued in a question-and-answer format, Haksar addresses the general question of India's interests head-on. To answer the question of what India's interests are, he explains:

First and foremost, our interest is to safeguard the integrity, sovereignty and independence of our country. Secondly, our interest is to create such conditions which maximise the possibility of the well-being of our people which means social, economic and cultural developments of the country as a whole. We recognise that in the present day world, constituted as it is, the many sided reconstruction of our country is not possible without international peace. That is why we have absolute interest in the maintenance of international peace.⁶³

References to 'international peace' here are not proclamations of a peacenik. In fact, as he explains to Indira Gandhi, central to his arguments on attainment of India's national interests were factors such as "the strength of the economy," "capacity of our armed forces," and "on the balance of power in the world."⁶⁴ But such general support for detente did not translate into surrender of India's national interests, specifically in relation to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). As he pointed out:

We must not beguile ourselves with the thought that the mere signing of the Non-proliferation treaty would produce the permanent basis for international detente. We are, of course, quite clear in our mind and we have stated in numerous occasions that we remain committed to the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes only. Our record is clear and everyone can see for himself and test the correctness of our intentions and of our policies. But we cannot simply delude

⁶² NMML, "Nuclear Policy", 3 May 1967 (Top Secret), Prime Minister's Secretariat, PN Haksar Papers (IIIrd Installment, Subject File No. 111.

⁶³ NMML, "PN Haksar to PM," 16 July 1967, Prime Minister's Secretariat (Immediate), PN Haksar Papers (IIRd Installment), Subject File No. 114.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

ourselves that by signing a Non-Proliferation Treaty, we would solve the problem of our security. That problem will remain with us irrespective of the signing of the treaty.⁶⁵

The ‘problem’ was in fact China, which clearly would not have signed the treaty and even if a party to the treaty, would have been a nuclear power. In his instructions to India’s Permanent Representative to the UN on the Non-Proliferation Treaty in April 1968, Haksar explained, “We cannot fail to notice that out of the five nuclear weapons powers, two will not be signatories to it. This might not have mattered but for the fact that one of the non-signatories is our neighbour, namely, China, who is full of hostile intentions towards our country.”⁶⁶ Haksar’s approach to the Non-Proliferation Treaty was to secure India’s national interests by not signing the NPT while ensuring that the spirit of detente symbolized by the treaty continued unabated. His instructions to India’s Permanent Representative at the UN are illustrative of this approach: “avoid polemical tone against the nuclear powers”; mention the Chinese threat but that “we should neither overplay that threat nor underplay it”; “should not mention Pakistan”; “stress the importance of the nuclear energy for economic and social development of the country”; “mention that our policy as hitherto continues to be to refrain from doing anything which would escalate the nuclear arms race”; vote in favour of any proposals “for improving the draft treaty” on disarmament; emphasize “security assurances” for all non-nuclear weapon states and object to any linkage of such assurances with the NPT and finally “on the question of the time table for conclusion of the Non-proliferation treaty, we should not spearhead any move for delay and postponement.”⁶⁷ The Indian approach towards the NPT, as illustrated by the original Haksar papers, is defined by India’s interests but also by the limits of its power. Haksar’s approach to

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶ NMML, “Instructions to India’s Representative to UN on Non-proliferation Treaty,” 20 April 1968 (Top Secret), PN Haksar Papers (I&II Installment), Subject File. No. 35.

⁶⁷Ibid.

the NPT is guided by India's national interests but also by the need to maintain an international political environment where China could be isolated, rather than being courted by the major powers. For these objectives, detente was an essential condition.

India's Nuclear Policy in the 1960s

When the only tool one has is a hammer, everything looks like a nail. In the *TNI* article (and also in the book, *The Nation Declassified*), two other important documents are used to substantiate Haksar's non-existent "long telegram": KR Narayanan's November 1964 memo (repeated in April 1970) and Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) documents from April 1970. Through very selectively quoting these documents, Prahladan tries to create additional legitimacy for Haksar's misattributed "long telegram." Yet closer examination of these documents prove that the "long telegram" was not Haksar's creation. When read with additional documentation from the NMML and the National Archives of India, they reflect the complexity of the Prime Minister's Secretariat and in the Ministry of External Affairs nuclear policy in the 1960s.

Narayanan's November 1964 Note

KR Narayanan's note entitled "India and the Chinese Bomb" of 26 November 1964, can be considered the most intellectually stimulating assessment of the Chinese nuclear threat and its consequences for India.⁶⁸ The note was prepared by KR Narayanan in his capacity as the Director of the China Division in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). As Narayanan argued at the beginning of this note, "The explosion of the first nuclear bomb by China is an event which will alter the political balance in Asia and disturb profoundly the status-quo in the world." For Narayanan, China going nuclear had many consequences for India.

⁶⁸ National Archives of India, "India and the Chinese Bomb," 26 November 1964 (Top Secret), *Ministry of External Affairs*, File No. HI/1012 (14)/64 Volume II.

Foremost in Narayanan's thoughts was the impact of a Chinese nuclear bomb on the Indian body-politic. As he explained, "In the hands of militant communist power like China the atom bomb has a special revolutionary significance." It will demonstrate the "efficacy and superiority of the Chinese social system" and the "revolutionary philosophy and methods preached by the Chinese leaders" to Indian masses. This "material progress" made by China would certainly affect the "thinking of the people of India" and will exert a "demoralising influence on the mass mind of India." For Narayanan, it was a shot in the arm of the "left-wing of the CPI (Communist Party of India)," which had celebrated China's nuclear test as an example of "spectacular progress" made by "socialist China" vis-a-vis what they thought was "capitalist India." Disruptive forces like the Nagas would become "more audacious" and many such "fissiparous and revolutionary developments will come to the fore." For Narayanan, India's internal cohesion was at stake.

If China's atom bomb was a blow to India's internal body-politic, it was also to have a ripple effect on Asia and Africa where India was hitherto seen as an example of a non-aligned power. He compared China's nuclear achievement with the "victory of Japan over Russia" in 1905 and argued that Afro-Asian countries' mute responses to a Chinese nuclear test should be seen as a celebration of China's achievement: "from a strictly moral point of view these countries do not consider China as an international leper because it has exploded a bomb." The fear was that in the shadow of this scientific achievement, Asian countries would start hitching their wagons to the Chinese dragon rather than balancing it.

Beyond Afro-Asia, Narayanan surmised, the effect would be palpable: henceforth, the US would take "China seriously", Western Europe would "move closer to China," and the other communist countries could not "condemn a major scientific achievement which emphasises the

efficacy of the socialist system.” The sum of all fears was the impending accommodation of China by the international community: “the majority of nations now feel that if it was illogical and unfair in the past to have kept China out of the international community, it would be positively dangerous to keep her out any longer now that she has a nuclear bomb.” Irrespective of the sophistication of the Chinese nuclear arsenal, “the world will have to treat China as a member of the so-called nuclear club.”

China's nuclear bomb was not only significant for internal politics in India and its foreign relations—it also had military consequences. Narayanan argued that nuclear weapons, like conventional arms, are part of the deadly apparatus of power in international politics. They are powerful, even when they are not used, and in the case of nuclear weapons they are politically useful only if they are not used.”

Narayanan's writings clearly point to an interpretation that nuclear weapons were essentially “political” in nature and not designed to fight wars. However, Narayanan also calibrates his assessment on the immediate military consequences of the Chinese bomb for India when he argues, “while [the Chinese nuclear bomb] is not a military factor yet, it will be an important factor 10–20 years when China has developed a stockpile and delivery system.” Even then, in Narayanan's assessment, India could not ignore the immediate military consequences as “Peking's bomb is not a tactical weapon, but a strategic instrument.” First, it would have had an impact on the border conflict and its resolution between India and China. Second, it would encourage China to “indulge with impunity in infiltration and subversion” both in NEFA (North Eastern Frontier Agency, now the state of Arunachal Pradesh) and Himalayan kingdoms (Bhutan and Nepal). Last, given India's “limited military and diplomatic initiative,” one alternative to

India's own bomb would be "subordinate friendship with China on Burmese-Cambodian pattern"; other being "an open military reliance on the United States."

In Narayanan's analysis, therefore, a Chinese nuclear weapon was a "crisis in India's national destiny." He parses a number of strategic choices India could pursue, such as "agree to co-exist with China on Chinese terms"; "seek alliances and nuclear protection from the United States"; "organise world public opinion against China and to work for Disarmament," but comes to the conclusion that the only real alternative India possessed was to make its "own nuclear weapons."

Notwithstanding Narayanan's passionate appeal for a nuclear weapons program, the question really is, how was this memo received by the higher echelons of the Indian decision-making apparatus? For one, a month after Narayanan officially submitted this memo, it was leaked to the US embassy in New Delhi via the Political Counsellor of the US Embassy, L. Douglas Heck, but without naming Narayanan as the author of this memo. The leak was performed by a source within the MEA and was likely done on purpose. Jayita Sarkar's article, "The Making of Non-aligned Nuclear Power: India's Proliferation Drift, 1964–68," quotes this leaked memo extensively.⁶⁹ Narayanan's leaked memo was triggered an assessment by the US Embassy staff that paraphrased Heck's discussions with his MEA source:

'X' described the document as a "working paper" that had been prepared to advance a particular point of view. As such, he said, it clearly "over-stated" the position. It was prepared primarily to stimulate a debate within the MEA on the subject, an objective which, he says, it effectively accomplished, having won many adherents at lower levels in the Ministry but having been rejected at the top.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Jayita Sarkar, "The Making of Non-aligned Nuclear Power: India's Proliferation Drift, 1964–68," *International History Review*, Vol. 37, No. 5 (2015), p. 933–950.

⁷⁰ For the original source, see end note 6 in Sarkar, "The Making of Non-aligned Nuclear Power" p. 947.

“Rejected at the top” is the most important information the US Embassy assessment provides. Evidence from the Indian archives shows that Narayanan knew his memo was rejected. In April 1970, as the Chinese sent their first satellite into orbit, Narayanan submitted his 1964 memo for reconsideration. By now, Narayanan was Director of the Policy Planning Division (PPD) of the MEA. In his cover letter of 28 April 1970, which also contained the 1964 memo, he writes:

The PRC has achieved a dramatic feat of sending up an earth satellite. It has caused great commotion in India. China's space and missile programme are a logical continuation of the nuclear policy adopted by it. The real departure for China took place in 1964 when the first Chinese atomic bomb was exploded at Lop Nor. I am placing below a copy of a paper I had prepared at that time on the possible consequences of the Chinese acquisition of nuclear weapons, particularly from the Indian point of view. I had put forward the view that the only option open to India was to go in for a nuclear programme of her own. The arguments used in the paper remain fresh and relevant even today; in fact they are more relevant today than in 1964. I am therefore, resubmitting this paper for your perusal.⁷¹

The cover note is evidence enough that Narayanan's 1964 note was ignored by higher echelons in the MEA and the Prime Minister's Secretariat. To substantiate the impact of Haksar's “long telegram” based on the existence of Narayanan's memo is, therefore, nothing more than an intellectual trick.

Yet the handwritten notes on the memorandum cover sheet by NR Verma, who was also in PPD (MEA) at that time, are even more significant. On 29 April 1970, Verma wrote two points on the cover letter:

1. It is a thought provoking and one of the best papers I have read so far on the necessity for India to go nuclear. I fully agree with the views expressed here.
2. However, I have been thinking for some time that our present reactors are of no great use in this respect since we are treaty bound to use them only for peaceful purposes. Therefore, the

⁷¹National Archives of India, “Note by KR Narayanan, Joint Secretary (Policy Planning),” 28 April 1970 (Secret), *Ministry of External Affairs*, File No. PP (JS) 3 (3)/74 Vol. II.

importance of indigenous plants cannot be underlined more than now. It is already late but still we can retrieve the lost ground.⁷²

Verma's notes point us to the most important factor in any nuclear weapons program: its capacity to produce fissile material. This is the most understudied dimension of India's nuclear program, and for most obvious reasons—the lack of information. Even with the declassified documents, one can only surmise, but most evidence points in the direction that India's nuclear capabilities were not so robust.

Indian decision-makers knew this fact. Whatever spin one may want to give to Bhabha's claims of making a nuclear weapon in 18 months in January 1962, by March 1965 this assessment was stretched to five years. This is available in yet another file in the National Archives of India. In a top-secret note written for Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri regarding nuclear guarantees from the superpowers on 23 March, 1965, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister L. K. Jha argued:

I might add that we have to evolve our approach in this matter (nuclear guarantees) not merely on considerations of foreign policy but also on hard strategic considerations. It is stated in Paragraph 4 of Foreign Secretary's note that Afro Asian powers are averse to the idea of nuclear weapons being carried in the Oceans close to their borders. I venture to point out that as a country which is to live with a hostile nuclear power on its borders, it may be difficult for us to be equally averse to movements of nuclear weapons of powers more friendly to us in the Indian Ocean. Both Defence Secretary and Secretary, Atomic Energy department, are averse to our taking an uncompromising stand on this issue (on US nuclear submarines in the Indian Ocean) in the view of the developments in China. Similarly, Dr. Bhabha argues with some force that the stand which we take against proliferation limits the freedom of action of only two or three countries, of which India is the most important, because in practical terms only two or three countries are in a position to make a nuclear bomb in *less than five years* [emphasis added]. I am drawing attention

⁷² National Archives of India, "Scribbled points on the Note by KR Narayanan, Joint Secretary (Policy Planning) by NR Verma (PP, MEA)," 29 April 1970 (Secret), *Ministry of External Affairs*, File No. PP (JS) 3 (3)/74 Vol. II.

to these considerations because this particular issue had to be viewed not merely in terms of world peace and disarmament but also in terms of our own immediate strategic preoccupation.⁷³

This note again points to a direction that Indian decision-makers were not blinded by idealism; the nuclear question was dealt with strategic consideration it deserved. But one cannot infer from it that the only route available for India was to produce its own nuclear weapons. This was essentially the debate that Perkovich explains in his own work.⁷⁴ The reference to the Department of Atomic energy and “pressures” exerted by them also point to the influence of the strategic enclave (to use Itty Abraham’s terminology⁷⁵) had on India’s nuclear decision-making. But most importantly, in terms of capability, as this note explains, even when India would have taken a decision to go nuclear in 1965, in Bhabha’s own assessment, it would have taken five years to do so, or at least, the earlier estimates of 18 months crash program stand revised.

It was important for India to not only exaggerate the Chinese threat, but also to exaggerate its own nuclear capabilities to both the West and the Soviet Union. An exaggerated version of India’s threat perceptions and its capabilities would have helped India’s cause both in terms of soliciting superpower support vis-a-vis China, but also because it would have provided India more bargaining power in nuclear negotiations. The leaking of Narayanan’s 1964 memo, therefore, must be seen in this light. It obviously created consternations in the US mind. This diplomatic strategy is substantiated by another document written by Foreign Secretary C.S. Jha to the Indian Ambassador in the US, BK Nehru, in 1966.

On 29 May 1966 and 3 June 1966, PK Bannerjee, counsellor at the Indian Embassy in Washington addressed faculty and students at Luther College Decorah, Iowa and Western State

⁷³ National Archives of India, “L.K. Jha to Prime Minister,” 23 March 1965 (Top Secret), *Prime Minister’s Secretariat*, File No. 30(36)/65/ PMS.

⁷⁴ Perkovich, *India’s Nuclear Bomb*, pp. 60–125.

⁷⁵ Itty Abraham, “India’s ‘Strategic Enclave’: Civilian Scientists and Military Technologies,” *Armed Forces and Society*, 18:2 (Winter 1992), pp. 231–252.

College at Colorado, respectively. These speeches focused on India's position on the NPT and on India's nuclear capability. In these speeches, Bannerjee said that India can "delay the decision but cannot avoid it." Later, his speeches were forwarded to the MEA at New Delhi. In November 1966, CS Jha, the Indian foreign secretary, wrote to the Indian Ambassador in Washington and expressed concern over the content of Bannerjee's speeches, saying that "here are certain aspects of Bannerjee's address which could either have been left unsaid or which might have been put in a way as to leave no room for misunderstanding of our position."⁷⁶ For one, Bannerjee had claimed that India has accumulated "weapons-grade" plutonium; to CS Jha, it was just a "false impression."⁷⁷ However, what was most important for Jha was to avoid any inquiry into India's nuclear capability by the US, which could lead to an exact assessment of India's nuclear capability. As he suggested to BK Nehru:

Irrespective of what decision we are taking or we may have to take in regard to the manufacture of nuclear weapons, it is of the greatest importance that we should not indulge in any public discussion on this question. As you are aware, the general assessment of our potential nuclear capability abroad is somewhat *exaggerated* [emphasis added]. There is no reason why we should seek to destroy this impression, which is expected to have a favourable impact in Afro-Asian countries. However, it is equally important that we should not go out of our way to confirm or emphasise our nuclear weapons capability.⁷⁸

Two important conclusions can be reached here. First, no firm decision had been taken to pursue a weapons program. Second, Indian decision-makers were not convinced of India's nuclear capability. It is obvious that both these factors reinforce the inference that India's nuclear program was not yet geared towards a weapons program. For one, if the decision would have been taken and the bomb would have become a national priority, gaps in capability can always

⁷⁶ National Archives of India, "C.S. Jha to B.K. Nehru", 9 November 1966 (Secret), *Ministry of External Affairs*, File No. WII/102/1/66.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Ibid.

be filled. The opposite is also true: a lack of capability may have been a dissuading factor for Indian decision-makers. These two aspects, in fact, may have constituted a feedback loop engendering an aversion to a full-fledged nuclear weapons program.⁷⁹

Both the weapons and nuclear energy programs faced enormous difficulties in the 1960s. This is illustrated in the negotiations between the Planning Commission and the DAE under Vikram Sarabhai for the DAE's annual budget in 1969–70, and is available in Amit Mitra's papers at the NMML. For India, even producing heavy water was a difficult enterprise. India had just begun its nuclear enrichment program, but as Vikram Sarabhai himself told the Planning Commission, no immediate results should be expected because of the sophisticated nature of the technology, and also because of the stringent technology-denial mechanisms put in place under the NPT.⁸⁰ Though India was the first Asian nation to operate a research reactor in 1955, the growth of Indian nuclear capabilities in power reactors was, in fact, slow.⁸¹ Its first power reactor, a turnkey project built with the help of Westinghouse at Tarapur, was commissioned only in October 1969. The reprocessing plant at Tarapur commissioned in 1965 started producing plutonium only in 1968. Even when India would have decided to go nuclear, it did not have the requisite fissile material, a fact previously pointed out by Raj Chengappa.⁸²

⁷⁹ The author is thankful to Prof. Rajesh Rajagopalan and Prof. Leopoldo Nuti for bringing nuance to the argument on capability in India's nuclear decision-making.

⁸⁰ In his submission to the Planning Commission in 1969, Sarabhai had said that "adopting enriched uranium fuel BWR reactors would involve a considerable outlay on setting up a Uranium enrichment plant. It would be necessary to obtain knowhow which is not easily available and it would take about 3 years thereafter to set up a Uranium enrichment plant." See NMML, "Summary of Records of the Meeting held in the Planning Commission for Discussion on Fourth Plan Proposal of the DAE," 16 December 1969, *Papers of Asok Mitra*, Subject File No. 131 (Secret).

⁸¹ Raja Ramanna, "Development of Nuclear Energy in India: 1947–73", Lecture Delivered under the auspices of The Nehru Memorial Museum, New Delhi, 1974 and reproduced in T.T. Poulouse (ed.), *Perspectives of India's Nuclear Policy* (New Delhi: Young Asia Publications, 1978), pp. 1–15.

⁸² Raj Chengappa, *Weapons of Peace* p. 185.

In the year 1970, when then-AEC Chairman Dr. Vikram Sarabhai proposed a 10-year plan for the Development of Atomic Energy,⁸³ “grave doubts” were expressed by none other than PN Haksar, who was also a member of AEC.⁸⁴ In a note to Prime Minister Gandhi, Haksar questioned the AEC’s capability, both in technology and materials, to implement the 10-year plan: “It is essential to have a clear idea of how the concept of initial technology in 1970 and the expected technological state in 1980 would be actually bridged.”⁸⁵ Haksar feared that the “basic relationships in planning for the future” of atomic energy in India—the heavy-water program, uranium and thorium reserves, scale of uranium enrichment, fissile material build-up, development of sophisticated reactor systems, etc—had not been handled adequately by the DAE. These “basic relationships” did suffer tremendously after India’s 1974 Peaceful Nuclear Explosion (PNE). The technology-denial regime after 1974 had done India’s nuclear program immense harm. As foreign firms stopped supplying equipment and material, the nuclear establishment began a period of indigenization; however, this took a considerable period of time.⁸⁶

India’s capacity for a “strategic nuclear program” in 1968, therefore, has always been under doubt. Yet, one must acknowledge that capability was a problem only to an extent that no firm decision was taken to build a nuclear weapons program. Both factors—lack of a firm decision and technical capability to pursue a strategic nuclear program—were applicable to India’s nuclear weapons program in the 1960s. This is most evident in the DAE assessment of April 1970, discussed below.

⁸³ See, Raja Ramanna, “Development of Nuclear Energy in India: 1947–73”, pp. 1–15; Also, Ashok Parthasarathi, *Technology at the Core: Science and Technology with Indira Gandhi*, (New Delhi: Pearson, 2007), p. 99–109.

⁸⁴ NMML, “A Note on “Atomic Energy and Space Research- A Profile for the Decade, 1970–1980,” 9 October 1970 (Secret), *PN Haksar Papers*, IIIrd Installment, Subject File No. 160.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ M.R. Srinivasan, *From Fission to Fusion: The Story of India’s Atomic Energy Programme*, (New Delhi: Viking, 2004), pp. 181–200.

The DAE's Assessment, April 1970

In April 1970, the opposition in India's parliament submitted a series of resolutions on nuclear weapons for the government's consideration. Two specific motions were passed by Shri Kanwar Lal Gupta and Shri Vir Bhadra Singh: One "on the manufacture of an atom bomb"⁸⁷ and another, similar motion on undertaking a "programme of manufacture of nuclear bomb in the interest of national security."⁸⁸ To preparing the Prime Minister for these Lok Sabha resolutions, the Department of Atomic Energy wrote several top-secret memos that were similar in approach and argument. These memos were prepared under the direction of PN Haksar, Vikram Sarabhai and Raja Ramanna (the file containing these memos is signed by all three).

The top-secret DAE memo, "Brief on Government's stand on the resolution by Shri Virbhadra Singh, M.P. for discussion in the house on 17th April, 1970," deals with the issue of India's nuclear weapons program in totality, but discusses "the threat of Chinese strategic arms" first.⁸⁹ The DAE memo begins with stressing the "strategic" nature of the Chinese nuclear weapons program, including "hydrogen bombs and long range missile system." The memo then argued:

If there is a good military reason for China to use its nuclear weapons against India, and this would be difficult to identify, China can only be deterred from using its strategic nuclear capability against India if India had a strategic capability of its own or if the use of this involves unacceptable risks to the Chinese through fear of involvement of the strategic capability of a third nation such as the USA or the USSR.

⁸⁷ National Archives of India, "Brief for the PM for the Debate in Lok Sabha on the motion of Shri Kanwar Lal Gupta, Member, Lok Sabha on the 'manufacture of an atom bomb'," 24 April 1970 (Top Secret), *Prime Minister Secretariat*, File No. 56/69/70-Parl.

⁸⁸ National Archives of India, "Subject: Private Member's Resolution for Discussion on the 17th April, 1970)," *Prime Minister's Secretariat*, File No. File No. 56/69/70-Parl.

⁸⁹ National Archives of India, Department of Atomic Energy (Top Secret), "Brief on Government's stand on the resolution by Shri Viebhdra Singh, M.P. for discussion in the House on 17th April, 1970," 24 April 1970 (Top Secret), *Prime Minister Secretariat*, File No. 56/69/70-Parl.

This statement corroborates the general emphasis in this working paper, and must be seen in the light of LK Jha's top-secret memos submitted to Prime Minister Gandhi in May 1967.⁹⁰ First, the DAE is certainly not sure whether a nuclear threat existed from the Chinese. Second, the emphasis on an international response to any use of Chinese nuclear weapons against India was also a very important factor in Indian decision-makers' strategic calculus about the need for an indigenous nuclear weapons program. Even when the DAE accepted that one could debate "how plausible it is whether the risk of a third party involvement would deter China from using the threat of strategic nuclear strike against India," the only alternative is for "India to engage herself in an arms race with China."

Before discussing how the DAE memo presented the need and requirements for an indigenous, strategic nuclear program, it may be more pertinent to understand Haksar and others' thinking on the issue of "third party involvement." This issue, as the DAE memo argued, must be viewed by taking note of "the special aspects of deterrence." As the memo explained:

Arms Control and deterrence are not based on the certainty that a particular party would retaliate against one but is dependent on a strong probability that this is so. For instance, just as nobody in India can be certain that the United States would use its weapons against China in the event of a Chinese threat to India, nobody in China can also be certain that the United States, in fact, will not use its weapons systems against her (China).

This omnipresent, though minimal, "element of risk" was an important aspect of India's nuclear thinking, even in 1970. This "element of risk" continued to define India's thought process and was embedded in India's nuclear doctrine of Credible Minimum Deterrent when it

⁹⁰ For a detailed explanation on LK Jha's memos see, Yogesh Joshi, "The Imagined Arsenal: India's Nuclear Decision-Making, 1973-76," *NPIHP Working Papers*, Wilson Center, June 2015, pp. 6-8 and 43-47.

was first announced in 1999. As Rajesh Basrur has argued, for nuclear deterrence to hold, the “element of risk” in the adversary’s calculus is sufficient.⁹¹

On the need for an indigenous, strategic nuclear program, the views were equally sophisticated. As the DAE memo argued, an indigenous program would involve a complex arsenal in “long range strategic nuclear weapons field, subject to continual sophistication and obsolescence of the system as is evident from the experience of the strategic balance between USA and USSR.” Haksar and others, this document reveals, were acutely aware of the requirements of deterrence as a “few nuclear bombs” could not answer the Chinese threat. In fact, India going nuclear without adequate preparations may prod China towards an escalatory response of an “arms race (by China) vis-a-vis India particularly in targeting her weapons more specifically towards our (Indian) cities.” It would also create a security dilemma for Pakistan and would force Islamabad to go nuclear—“if we do acquire a nuclear bomb this would create a strong psychological effect in Pakistan that our action was in fact directed solely against them.” Going nuclear without adequate preparation was, therefore, a double-edged sword: On one hand, it would aggravate the crisis with China without providing a sufficient deterrent, and on the other, it would “only escalate the arms race with Pakistan and drive the Pakistanis to press ahead with their atomic energy programme.”

Before drawing conclusions on whether India should or should not develop the nuclear bomb, the DAE memo thoroughly discussed another issue: whether the development of “tactical weapons” that may not involve the need for “strategic arsenal” would help India block any

⁹¹ See Rajesh Basrur, *Minimum Deterrence and India's Nuclear Strategy*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005). Also see, Rajesh Basrur, “Deterrence, Second Strike and Credibility: Revisiting India’s Nuclear Strategy Debate,” IPCS Issue Brief No. 255, July 2014, http://www.ipcs.org/pdf_file/issue/IB255-RajeshBasrur-IndiaNuclear.pdf; Basrur, Rajesh (2014), “Nuclear Deterrence: The Wohlstetter-Blackett Debate Revisited,” *RSIS Working paper No. 271*, 5 April 2014. <http://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/rsis-pubs/WP271.pdf>

conventional Chinese thrusts across the Himalayas. These arguments were made by strategists such as Subramaniam Swami postulating that tactical nuclear weapons could help counter Chinese conventional superiority on the Himalayan frontier.⁹² However, the need for tactical nuclear weapons was also expressed by Stephen Cohen in an anonymous article that appeared in the magazine *Seminar* in 1965.⁹³ Since China could also use tactical nukes against a formidable defense posted by India's conventional forces, India must have this capacity to retaliate in kind.⁹⁴ For Indian decision-makers like Haksar, these arguments were highly fallacious. For one, China's use of nuclear weapons would not stop at the tactical level, even if such use was "successfully countered" by India's tit-for-tat tactical nuclear response. Given that China had a strategic arsenal, it could always escalate the nuclear conflict to the "strategic level." As the top-secret DAE memo argued, "Indian commentators (like Swami) are misinterpreting the situation when they claim that one country having only tactical nuclear weapons can deter another with both tactical and strategic weapons." This was because in a crisis situation in which nuclear use at any level is even considered, escalation cannot be controlled by one party: "Every time a tactical exchange takes place, it invariably escalates to a strategic level as soon as one of the parties starts having the worst of the tactical exchange." Such an acute understanding of inherent dangers in climbing the nuclear ladder was present in the Indian strategic mindset back in the

⁹² Subramaniam Swamy, "Defence and Economic Growth in India: a study in an inseparable relationship," *Jana-Deep Souvenir* (A Publication brought out on the occasion of the 15th Annual Session of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, Bombay, April 25–27, 1969), pp. 67–87; Subramaniam Swamy, "India's Nuclear Strategy," *Shakti*, July–September 1969. Stephen Cohen had also argued that India should go for tactical nuclear weapons in the 1960s.

⁹³ Seminarist, "The Bomb: Strategic Considerations," *Seminar* (New Delhi), January 1965. Cohen had written this piece anonymously. See, Stephen P. Cohen, *The South Asia Papers: A critical Anthology of Writings*, (Washington DC: Brookings Institute Press, 2016), p. 9. Also see, Lorne J. Kavic, *India's Quest for Security: Defence Policies, 1947–65*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), p. 216–217.

⁹⁴ Such arguments are still held by India's deterrence maximalists. For example, Bharat Karnad argues in his 2015 book that the "only credible nuclear deterrent in the circumstances (of India-China war on the Himalayan front) are atomic demolition munitions (ADMs) placed just behind the prepared defensive line along the likely ingress routes of the PLA in the mountain." See, Bharat Karnad, *Why India is a not a Great Power (Yet)* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 389.

1970s. Contemporary Indian nuclear doctrine also shows remarkable similarity in its aversion to nuclear-war fighting.

The DAE memo did not make these arguments in order to enunciate a nuclear doctrine, but to stress the fact that any effective nuclear deterrence against China could only come from an indigenous nuclear weapons program that was 'strategic' in nature. It never spelt out in exact detail what a "strategic system" looks like: types of warheads, types of missiles and their range and other delivery systems. One wonders why.

For Haksar and others, if the need to deter China necessitated a strategic nuclear deterrent, India was neither prepared nor viewed it in its national interest. In fact, the whole point of the discussion and emphasis on "strategic nuclear systems" in the DAE memo was to convey the message that pursuance of a strategic nuclear program would have an overwhelmingly negative effect on India's limited resources, its pressing economic needs, and the necessity to build its conventional military capability on China's border. As the DAE memo, under the subheading "Steps to make India militarily strong," explained: "[I]n the interests of (India's) security it (India) must look to the more basic factors which make a country militarily strong." The memo postulated that "if we (India) do not maintain a good rate of progress in the economic and social development of the nation, we shall face a most serious internal crisis threatening the very integrity of India." Economic growth could also prevent fissiparous tendencies present in the Indian body-politic. It was necessary to maintain a balance between "internal development" and "adequate state of preparedness" in order to resist outside aggression. Ensuring India's security through a nuclear deterrent requires a "total defensive system" involving a "total commitment of national resources of a most stupendous magnitude." Therefore, the DAE memo

argued that the “Government of India is opposed to undertake a programme of manufacturing nuclear bombs because this would not be in the interests of national security.”

The DAE memo shows that in April 1970, India was clearly not prepared for such a dedicated and enormously costly affair as a strategic nuclear system. It could have turned India into a national security state, as was the case with all other nuclear powers where every resource was made available for the nuclear program. If this was the thought process of PN Haksar and Vikram Sarabhai in April 1970, it is more than clear that Haksar could not have written the non-existent “long telegram” in 1968.

Conclusion

The main objective of this paper was not to offer a documented history of India’s nuclear policy in the 1960s. It was principally to expel doubts and consternation created by the “long telegram” in the minds of scholars, Indian decision-makers and the Indian public. The non-existent “long telegram” distorts the entire research agenda on India’s nuclear history in the 1960s, whether it is the issue of India’s nuclear weapons program, its nuclear diplomacy, its quest for nuclear security guarantees, or its approach to the NPT and the nature and consequences of the Chinese nuclear threat. The “long telegram” also has consequences for research on Indian nuclear policy in subsequent decades. These issues cannot be covered adequately in a single paper; they are all subjects of book-length research.

However, a few arguments can be made on India’s nuclear policy. First, the Indian establishment did not discount the Chinese nuclear threat; it was adequately considered at the highest levels. But the existence of the threat does not translate into a monolithic policy of manufacturing nuclear weapons. In fact, the complexity of India’s approach must be seen in terms of economic pressure, the need to build an adequate conventional defense along the

Chinese border, a sophisticated understanding of nuclear deterrence, as well as their reading of international politics. In hindsight, the decision not to go nuclear in the 1960s and 1970s does not appear to be particularly damaging to India's national security. Yet it brought significant diplomatic costs: India is still struggling to be a full-fledged member of the nuclear non-proliferation regime.

India's approach to the NPT was equally revealing. The Indian government wanted detente to continue, as it would have aided India's effort to isolate China internationally. Yet, Indian decision-makers also sought to retain the option to build nuclear weapons. This need was felt in the late 1970s, as Pakistan made continuous strides toward nuclear weapons with Chinese assistance. As I have argued in a previous working paper for Nuclear Proliferation International History Project, India's 1974 nuclear test was not military in nature.⁹⁵

Lastly, PN Haksar was not a nuclear hawk. His ideas reflect a nuanced understanding of how one could use the peculiar conditions of international politics to further India's security needs. He was not the hammer suggested by the "long telegram". Future research may provide him a label—whether he was India's Kennan or its Metternich—but there is no doubt that his acumen and intellect were fundamental to the process and substance of India's foreign and security policy in the late 1960s and early 1970s. But most importantly, he understood India's limits—both of its power and ambitions. In this sense, he was a classical realist. Contemporary Indian decision-makers ought to reflect on this particular attribute.

The "long telegram" episode also has some implications for transparency and openness on the part of the Government of India. The continuous declassification of documents by the

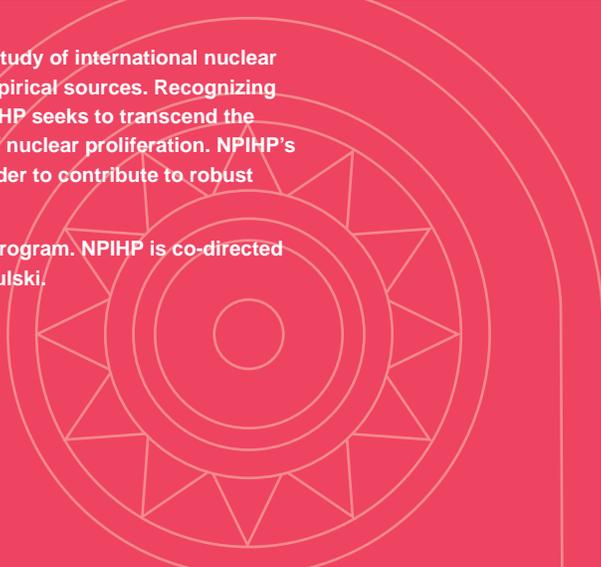
⁹⁵ Yogesh Joshi, "The Imagined Arsenal: India's Nuclear Decision-Making, 1973–76," *NPIHP Working Papers*, Wilson Center, June 2015.

Government of India has allowed a critical, yet credible, scholarship to prosper.⁹⁶ We have seen a number of important scholarly contributions to India's foreign and security policy in recent years. Yet more can be done, and the National Archives and the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library deserve greater resources. The "long telegram" issue underlines the necessity of maintaining open access to records and former policymakers in India.

The recent critical mass of scholarship on nuclear history can do much to inform India's foreign and security policy. There is a need for more analytical rigor in scholarship and more careful review of scholarly work. Research on India's security and foreign policy will only prosper through adequate checks and balances. As Haksar, the scholar, told a gathering of journalists in April 1975, "We must bring rationality in our debate, we must subject our debates to the discipline of facts and to scientific methodology of testing hypothesis in the light of facts."⁹⁷

⁹⁶ It includes work on India as well those which have used archival sources in India. Srinath Raghavan, *War and Peace in Modern India: a strategic history of Nehru Years* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2010) and *1971: A Global History of the Creation of Bangladesh*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013); Manjari Chatterjee Miller, *Wronged by Empire: Post-Imperial Ideology and Foreign Policy of India and China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013); Rudra Chaudhuri, *Forged in Crisis: India and the United States since 1947* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2013); Paul McGarr, *The Cold War in South Asia, 1945–1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Sergey Radchenko, *Unwanted Visionaries: The Soviet failure in Asia at the end of the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁹⁷ PN Haksar, "Discipline of Facts," Lecture Delivered at the Indian Institute of Mass Communication, New Delhi, 26 April 1975 and reproduced in Subrata Bannerjee (ed.), *PN Haksar: Contemplations on the Human Condition—selected Writings, speeches and letters (Haksar Memorial Volume I)*, (Chandigarh: Center for Research and Industrial Development, 2004), p. 214–216.



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